John FitzThomas (c. 1195–1261)

Origin and Family

Born c. 1195. Died 1261.

Father: Thomas FitzMaurice (c. 1145–1213)
Mother: Ellinor de Marisco
Spouse: (1) Margery FitzAnthony, daughter of Lord Thomas FitzAnthony of Desmond
(2) Honera or Una Ni Connor

Children:[2]
According to many sources, each of John's six recorded sons was born of different mothers.[5]

- Maurice FitzJohn (of Margery fitz Anthony) was ancestor to the Earl of Desmond
- Gilbert (of wife of O'Coileáin) was ancestor of the White Knights
- John (of wife of O'Cuinnin) was ancestor of the Knights of Glin and the Black Knights
- Maurice (wife of O'Cinneidigh [Kennedy]) was the ancestor to the Knights of Kerry and the Green Knights.
- Thomas (of wife of O'Connor Kerry)
- Philip.

It is said he had other illegitimate children, possibly including Osbwrn Wyddel, although Osbwrn is sometimes associated with Honera.[1]

John FitzThomas, Lord of Connello, was also known as John of Callann. John was born around 1195 or possibly earlier in Shanid. He was among the Geraldine Norman-English lords who ruled Ireland but constantly struggled with the native chieftains. He married first Margery FitzAnthony, through whom he acquired the lordship of Decies and Desmond.

John passed his power to his sons, many of whom were born illegitimately of liaisons with the wives of Irish chieftains.[5]

Occupation and Property

In the early 1200's, John built a castle at Glin in Shanid. John also founded Tralee where he built a Castle in 1216 and later created the Dominican Abbey there in 1243.

In 1259, John FitzThomas was recognized as Lord Palatine in Desmond. According to tradition, he used this sovereign authority to bestow three unique, hereditary knighthoods upon his sons:

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- The White Knight (Fitzgibbon)
- The Knight of Glin (The Black Knight)
- The Knight of Kerry (The Green Knight)

While some historians suggest these titles were formalized by the Earls of Desmond later in the 14th century,[8] they remain the only three feudal hereditary knighthoods recognized in Ireland today."[3]

The Knights of Kerry lived in Dingle. Shown here are the remains of Rahinane Castle, once home of the knights.

This castle was the residential fort of the chieftains of the locality before the arrival of the Normans. The Fitzgeralds constructed a number of 'castles' (in reality fortified tower-houses) in the western part of the Dingle Peninsula, examples of which survive at Gallarus, Minard and at the family seat of Rahinane. The Knight of Kerry lived there until Cromwellian times. All the Fitzgerald castles were either captured or destroyed by Cromwellian forces around 1650.[3]

John FitzThomas played a prominent role in the history of the time:[6]

> An Irish rebel Finghin in 1248 captured the Norman Geoffrey de Cogan and drowned him with a stone tied to his neck. The following year he 'made war and wrought great havoc on the Galls [Normans] of Desmond.' But the Cogans, aided by a new ally, Domhnall MacCarthy, slew Finghin. Two years later this Domhnall was in turn taken prisoner and slain by John FitzThomas and his son Maurice. This no doubt angered the Cogans, who continued to support the MacCarthys, and appear to have given no assistance to the Geraldines in their efforts to overthrow another Finghin, the son of Domhnall, at Callann.
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> After several legal rulings, in 1259 Lord Edward granted John lands for rent in lands controlled by MacCarthy, but the barons refused to accept rent demands for the lands 'because John never had seisin by the justiciary or other bailiffs of the Lord Edward in Ireland. This led to additional skirmishes which culminated in the War of Callann in 1261. The Munster Geraldines formed the backbone of the expedition, headed by John and his son, Maurice FitzJohn.
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> Finghin MacCarthy had learned much from his opponents during his years of conflict. At Callann he chose his battleground, at a spot where a mountainous river called the Slaheny joins the Ruachtach, close by the castle of Ardtully. No doubt he reckoned that here the heavily-armoured cavalry of the invader could be used to the least advantage. The Geraldines were defeated and John FitzThomas and his son were killed.
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> After the battle, Finghin swept eastwards and northwards through Desmond, burning the Norman strongholds of Dún Mic Oghmainn, Dún Uisce, Macroom, Magh Oiligh, Dunloe, and Killorglin, as well as much of the land of Uí Chonaill. But at the Norman stronghold at Ringrone, the Irish were defeated and Finghin, along with many of the nobles of Desmond, were slain.

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After Callan, the Mac Carthys were firmly established as lords of south Kerry and west Cork. Still, the Geraldines persisted for many centuries. Thomas FitzMaurice, grandson of John FitzThomas, did succeed in getting a re-grant of his grandfather's lands in 1292.

The FitzThomas Coat of Arms may have been the same as that of his father Thomas FitzMaurice. However, his son John added a monkey atop the crest. The legend goes that the Fitzgerald clan had a pet monkey at the castle in Woodstock. One day, John FitzGerald, 1st Earl of Kildare, as a baby was trapped in a fire. The monkey broke his chains and rescued the baby, carrying him to safety. The Fitzgeralds then adopted a monkey as their crest and occasionally used the additional motto *Non immemor beneficii* (Not forgetful of a helping hand). The motto shown, Crom a boo, was used as a war cry and means Crom forever, referring to their clan's homeland.[7]

End of Life

John FitzThomas died in the Battle of Callann in 1261.

Research Notes

Online Genealogy References:
WikiTree ID: FitzGerald-3758
FamilySearch ID: LZL4-C4H
Wikipedia: John FitzThomas

Further Reading:
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- Wikipedia: Duke Leinster

References

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2. Geraldine Research Site: Archive.Org WayBack link from 2011

3. The Fitzgeralds of Desmond: Archive.Org WayBack link from 2006

4. Limerick Diocese Heritage: Glin Parish

5. Ancestors of the Knights of Kerry: Archive.Org WayBack link from 2007

6. Diarmuid Ó Murchadha. The Battle of Callan Cork Historical and Archaeological Society, 1961.

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8. Burke, Bernard. A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain & Ireland. London: Harrison, 1879. Vol I, p. 565.

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